



PROMISES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ENABLED LEARNING IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Social media is one technological discovery in the last decade which has affected all aspects of human lives. Social media has invaded in and is affecting all aspect of social system (be it political system, economical system, culture, or education system). This can be attributed due to user friendliness and ease of access of these social media technologies. According to a recent survey report there were approximately 216.5 million social network users in India by the end of 2016 and this statistic has been estimated to reach 358.2 million in the year 2021 (statista.com). The effect of social media is also evident in the education system. Teachers and learners across the globe use these technologies to connect with others and share content on these platforms. Researchers around the world are interested in exploring the promises and potentialities that these social media technologies can bring in the education system. The objective of this paper is to discuss different attributes of social media tools that can prove to be beneficial in the education system. In the present paper, the benefits or promises of using social media enabled learning within the education system were also discussed.

KEYWORDS: Social media, Constructivist learning, Collaborative Learning, Education system.

Introduction

In the last decade, the society has witnessed significant rise in the development of different social media technologies. In its initial phase the internet was dominated by the static websites which served the purpose of information repositories for the internet users. Initially Web 1.0 was the term coined to refer to those websites which allows the users to gain access to the information available around the world. Then the era of development of interactive web space came, where the users can not only generate and share content but also collaborate and interact with others in a number of ways. There is not a single comprehensive definition of social media available in the education literature. This is due to the ever-changing and expanding nature of social media landscape. However, comprehensively social media refers to all those digital platforms which enables the users to share, connect, communicate, collaborate, and interact on virtual space. As defined by Dabbagh & Reo (2011) social media refers to, "a variety of networked tools or technologies that emphasize the social aspects of the internet as a channel for communication, collaboration, and creative expression".

Need of using Social media in Education

Social media has permeated in all aspects of our lives. People are using or are forced to use these social media platforms in their daily lives. Education system has also been affected by these social media platforms. Students of all ages and different socio or economic backgrounds are using social media informally to connect with others. There is an ongoing debate among the scholars and educators as to whether possibilities of using social media as an educational tool should be explored or not. This is due to the informal and unstructured learning that social media endorses. Arguably it can be said that although social media supports and creates an informal learning environment, it can still be used to enhance the teaching-learning process.



Fig. 1 Attributes of Social Media in Education

Attribute of Social Media in Education

The essential attributes of social media are sharing, connection, communication, collaboration, community building, openness, and originality (Fig. 1). Social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, Flipboard, Whatsapp, Instagram etc. allow the users to share and exchange a variety of resources. This exchange develops a sense of oneness among the users. Different social networking sites also allow the users to connect with others globally who share common interests. Users across the globe use different social networking sites as a tool to communicate with others. Social media has the possibility to interact with others through chat rooms, forums, or on groups. While using social media in learning the teacher can form various groups for different assignments. Students can collaborate with one another to complete the tasks assigned to them. While collaborating with others students get opportunities to refine the abilities they are good at, as well as to learn new skills. Use of social media creates an open environment where the users can have an insight into the achievements of others as well as the new initiatives taken up by others. Community building is another attribute which is specific to social media based learning. Connections and collaborations on these platforms helps in forming communities. These groups and forums can be used to create awareness about various issues of importance.

Promises of social media technologies

1. Provides constructivist learning environment

Lately, constructivism has become a buzz word in the field of education. The focus of education system is to create constructivist learning environment. As elaborated by Wilson & Cole (1991), the specific characteristic of constructivist learning environment is its ability to provide meaningful problem-solving environment and learner's control in the teaching-learning process. Use of social media allows the students to explore a number of resources and in the process of meaning making the problems encountered by them can be solved individually as well as collaboratively. While using social media, learners control can be ensured in terms of the content the learners want to explore.

2. Supports social constructivism in totality

Social constructivist theory emphasises the role of social context, language, and culture in the learning process. Scaffolding is an important concept in social constructivism, wherein the mentor or the guide provides appropriate support to the learners in the process of knowledge construction. While using social media in education teachers can intervene appropriately to enable the learners to work as independently as possible. Also, it encourages the students to connect with others and express themselves in the learning process. Language plays an important role in the whole learning process.

3. Supports Formal and Informal learning

Social media tools can prove to be very beneficial in the formal learning environments as well as informal learning environments. Within the formal classroom structure different social media tools can be used to share various resources as well as to carry on discussions on various topics of interest. It allows the learners to post their queries and to clarify their doubts. In the informal learning structure these tools can be used by individuals to get the information on various topics and to connect with the individuals with similar interests. With the help of these tools it is possible to connect with the marginalised sections of the society. So in a way

it promotes social equity as it provides equal opportunities of learning to all.

4. Increases student achievement

Learning through social media takes on a virtual platform. These platforms are characterised with the help of text, sound, pictures, and video format. These formats make the entire learning process very appealing to the learners. Research studies have proved that social media has the potential to increase academic achievement as the learners are more involved in the learning process.

5. Sharpen social attitudes.....?

There is an ongoing debate in the education circles as to whether use of social media refines or diminishes the social values and attitudes in the learners. Use of social media definitely facilitates the learners to work independently and collaborate with others in the learning process. In the process the students interact and give feedback to each other. In this whole process the students learn basic mannerisms of the communication. Also, social media can be used as a platform where students learn to refine their social skills virtually.

6. Synchronous and asynchronous communication

One of the major benefit of using social media in education is that, it provides flexibility in terms of time and place where communication has to take place. It allows the students and teachers to communicate synchronously as well as asynchronously. The teachers and students can use different social media tools within the class as well as outside the class to interact with one another. It also allows the learners to solve

7. Personalised learning experiences

One of the major contribution and focus of Computer Assisted Instruction(CAI) is to provide personalised experiences to the learners. Social media can prove to be very beneficial in personalising the learning experiences for the students. Use of social media in education allows the teachers to interact with the students on one to one basis. In this way, it enables the teacher to understand the needs of the learner and provide the experiences to the learners accordingly.

Conclusion

Every technology that can be used has its benefits and limitations. Social media can be used to make the entire teaching-learning process learner centred. It can offer a wide variety of opportunities within the educational system. Along with this, there are certain considerations that should be followed in order to maximise the benefits of these technologies. There is a very fine line between the formal learning structure and informal learning structure provided by different social media. The educators and the institutions should make a clear and precise policy in terms of the role of the teachers and students. Appropriate orientation about the functional aspects of different social media tools and legal provisions against cyberbullying should be included in the initial sessions before actually using it. Social media is an extension of the classrooms and thereby the basic considerations and behaviours that are followed in the classrooms should be followed on these platforms too. Teachers and students should cautiously use the language used to communicate on these platforms.

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